

4. Family Contacts and Assistance

Our review of the files indicated that the FBI had no hard evidence linking James Ray to any conspiracy to kill Dr. King. Absent such evidence, the Bureau apparently discounted the significance of any contact between Ray and his family. As the Chicago case agent told us, it is not unusual for a fugitive or a person who has committed a given crime to be in touch with family members. While such contact may render the actions of the family member criminally liable, it is not generally pursued absent some evidence of direct participation in the crime.

However, in light of the fact that a good deal of mystery still surrounds James Ray and the assassination, particularly the means by which he financed his life style and travels, we concluded that on the basis of the information which was uncovered, the Bureau should have pursued this line of the investigation more thoroughly.

The connection of the Ray family to the crime against Dr. King may have been nonexistent. This does not alter the fact, however, that the FBI discovered that the subject of the largest manhunt in history had been aided in his fugitive status by at least one family member. This and other facts suggestive of family assistance became clear as the Bureau's investigation progressed.

First, John and Jerry Ray had significant contacts with James while he was in Missouri State Penitentiary (MSP) at Jefferson City, Missouri. Jerry Ray visited James three or four times and had borrowed money from James on at least one occasion during his confinement (Chicago 44-1144 Sub G-17). John Ray visited or attempted to visit James Ray while at MSP on at least nine occasions. The last visit took place on April 22, 1967, the day before Ray escaped (HQ 44-338861-4503). The Bureau also discovered that while in prison at MSP James Ray had a fellow inmate send a money order to a fictitious company (Albert J. Pepper Stationary Co.) in St. Louis, Missouri. The money was sent to the address of Carol Pepper (sister and business partner of John Ray) where she resided with her husband Albert. James Ray had told the inmate who sent the money that it was a way of getting money out of the prison (HQ 44-38861-2614).

Second, James Earl Ray was seen by several people in both the St. Louis and Chicago areas during the period immediately after his escape. In St. Louis (where John Ray was living) two former inmates at MSP, stated that they had seen James Ray on separate occasions. One stated that he had seen Ray three times between May 10 and 17, 1967 (Kansas City, 44-760-786). The other saw Ray entering a bank with Jimmie Owens and spoke briefly with Ray as they entered

Fourth, through an informant the Bureau discovered that Jerry Ray may not have been entirely candid with the special agents during his several interviews. The informant disclosed to Bureau agents on June 7, 1968, that Jerry Ray stated he had seen his brother (James) at least once at a pre-arranged meeting place in St. Louis shortly after his escape. Jerry also allegedly stated to the informant that he had recognized the photograph of Eric Starvo Galt as being identical with his brother James prior to the time the FBI had first contacted him in connection with the assassination. He did not want to tell the FBI everything he knew out of fear that James would be caught. (HQ 44-38861-4594.)

Correspondence recovered by the Bureau indicated that Jerry may have heard from James in Canada in June of 1968 (HQ 44-38861-4517 and 4518). James Ray was in Canada during April and May of 1968 prior to his departure for London on May 7, 1968 (HQ 44-38861-4595). It is also noted that Jerry had earlier told agents that he had received mail from James, while James was in prison, at Post Office Box 22

Wheeling, Illinois (Chicago 44-114 Sub G-26).

Finally, in November, 1968 it became clear that James Ray had been in touch with his brother Jerry. Illinois motor vehicle records showed that on August 25, 1967 James Ray (using the name of John L. Rayns) transferred his 1962 Plymouth to Jerry (HQ 44-38861-5413). This was during the period when James Ray was making his way from Canada to Birmingham, Alabama. It has continued to be a mystery as to why Ray went to Alabama, how he traveled there, and where he obtained the several thousand dollars he had when he arrived.

Thus, at least one family member, Jerry, had lied to the FBI and had become subject to federal criminal charges for aiding a fugitive. He was never confronted with these facts by the Bureau. In the task force interview of Jerry Ray, he confirmed the fact that he had lied to the Bureau and had seen his brother James on several occasions.*/ Jerry denied knowing anything about James' travels or his source of funds (Interview of Jerry Ray, December 20, 1976, App. B). However, the task force found the credibility of Jerry's

*/ The task force attempted to talk to James and John Ray but an interview was refused in both instances.

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denials to be suspect. In light of this low credibility and critical passage of time which has allowed the statute of limitations to run, we concluded that the FBI abandoned a significant opportunity to obtain answers from family members concerning some of the important questions about James Earl Ray which still remain.